1:Gabb N-5 (1873-1874) 1876
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173 came among them, I could get no more satisfactory answer than that they went to Cartago to buy them. I have been told a vague story, however, that long ago there were two bands living in the country now occupied by the Bri-bris. Those living in the valley, around the junction of the branches of the Tilíri were more powerful than the mountaineers, and forced the latter to pay tribute when they descended to hunt, or cut the material for their bark-cloth clothing. But gradually the lowlanders died out; the highlanders, becoming the more powerful, rebelled against these impositions, and eventually emigrated in such numbers to the country of the former, that the distinction became lost by an amalgamation of the two parties. Even now the Bri-bris, who occupy the lowlands and most of the hill regions of the Sicsola, look down on their neighbors the Cabecars and treat them as inferiors. The Cabecars, on the other hand, tacitly acknowledge even a social supremacy, and in a mixed party submit to assume the more menial occupations, like bringing water and wood; and are always obliged to wait until the last when food or drink is being served. Few of the Bri-bris speak the Cabecar language, but there are few of the Cabecars who do not speak Bri-bri, and they usually use it in the presence of strangers. The Cabecars have no chief of their own, but are entirely under the rule of the Bri-bri chief, and have been, from time immemorial. Their subjugation is, in short, complete. At the same time they have the honor of religious supremacy, in so far as that the high priest, the "*Usekara*," whose office will be explained further on, belongs to their tribe. The ordinary priests, the "*Tsugurs*," who, like the "*Usekara*," are hereditary, come from a group of families on the Coen River, but belong to the Bri-bri tribe.

[563] [622] [793]

About the beginning of this century there was a bitter war between the Bri-bris and the Tiribis. The youngest members of the war parties are now mostly dead, and the few remaining survivors are very old men. The last of the warriors proper, mature men at that time, died about 1800, at an extremely advanced age. I have heard the traditions from both sides the question, and of course each party throws all the blame on the other. The Bri-bri story is that some people, a whole family, living on the extreme eastern portion of the Uren district, were found murdered, and no clue discovered to the perpetrators of the act. Not very long afterwards other murders occurred in an equally mysterious manner, which threw the whole country into a state of excitement. Afterwards a small party was attacked by some unknown Indians, a portion killed and some left to tell the tale. The tracks of the strangers were followed through the woods, always keeping to the east, until they were lost. Following this clue, the chief of the Bri-bris sent out a party of armed scouts, who climbed to the summit of the dividing ridge, overlooking the Tilorio. From here they discovered for the first time that they had neighbors; seeing their houses and cornfields in the distance. A large war party was fitted out; they passed the mountains, and without warning descended on the unsuspecting

173 721

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accidental discovery at rare intervals, of a half-rotten trunk in the woods. 824
It is prized principally for its color, which is between that of old mahogany and rosewood, and which is probably in part due to seasoning, or to some change in the heart, consequent on the decomposition of the surface. When an Indian finds one of these sticks, he marks the spot, but dares not take possession immediately. He must purify himself by a [783]
three days fast before he can begin work on it. It is believed that these sticks are under the protection of a poisonous snake, and if the person has not properly prepared himself, the guardian will revenge the outrage by biting him.

The privileged classes, apart from the chiefs, are three. Two of these [565]
are hereditary. The *U-se'-ka-ra* is a sort of high priest, and is of nearly 793
as great importance in the eyes of the people as the chief. In fact, the time was, and not very long ago either, when the chiefs themselves made journeys to visit him as suppliants. The present incumbent is a youth of perhaps twenty-five years of age, and is not yet full fledged. His predecessor, his father, died recently, and, until after the funeral feast, he cannot enter fully into the exercise of his functions. The family lives far back in the hills of Cabecar, and, although a member of that despised tribe, has from time immemorial held undisputed sway over both it and the Bri-bris.

The former *U-se'-ka-ra* was very arrogant, and would hold no communication with foreigners. He claimed supernatural powers, and held frequent interviews with spirits. On these occasions he went alone to a cave, several miles from his house, and spent days together there. On his return he would not converse even with his own family. Nobody but his familiar, now a very old man, was allowed to serve him, or even to speak to him for a certain number of days after his return from one of these mysterious journeys. He rarely traveled about, or visited his neighbors. He lived by levying contributions on the people, or by voluntary presents. His only beverage was chocolate, and the cacao was contributed as voluntary gifts from people far and near. If he entered a house, and offered to buy, or expressed even admiration for anything, whether a chicken, a pig, or any other object, it was at once presented to him. It was considered as good as forfeited. If not presented, it would be sure to die anyhow, and his ill-will would be gained besides. In case of any public calamity, like an epidemic disease, or a scarcity of food from drought, the chief only must visit him, and beg his intercessions with the spirits. He would pay no attention to private appeals. If ever he felt inclined to be gracious, he would retire to his cave, and in due time after order a fast. The young man who now holds the position, is one of the finest looking men in the country. He is tall and well formed, his good-natured looking face bears an expression of seriousness hardly in keeping with his youth; and his whole bearing is grave and impressive. I was forcibly struck by his manner, being so strongly in contrast with the light-hearted, talkative character of most of the people. When in

1:Gabb N-5 (1873-1874) 1876
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793 Cabecar he visited us twice, and on neither occasion did he speak, except when spoken to, unless it was to make some remark, in very few words, and in a low tone of voice, to some of his attendants. His dress consisted of a white shirt, not over clean, a woven cotton breech-cloth, a bright-red handkerchief, tied in a roll around his head, and a magnificent necklace [126] of four strands of large tiger's teeth. He sold me two of the strings for half-a-dollar, and I presented him with some trifles, among which was the rather suggestive article, a bar of soap. He accepted them without any acknowledgment. But then they don't know how to say, "thank you."

767 793 Next in importance are the *Tsu'-gurs*. These are the ordinary priests, and their duties are confined to officiating at the feast for the dead. Like the preceding, they are hereditary; only members of one or two families can become priests, and these seem to have all descended from a common ancestor. I have already described the performances of the *Tsu'-gur* at the death-feast of Santiago, and there is nothing to add in that connection. Other feasts only differ in the less degree of profusion and the shorter time they occupy. But there is one circumstance of which I have said little, and that has always seemed to me mysterious. Unfortunately, from no want of effort on my part, I was not successful in investigating this more thoroughly. The songs of these priests are in a language, dialect, 198 or jargon, whichever it may be called, in great part unintelligible to the uninitiated. Some words used are in the vernacular, but many of the nouns are peculiar. *Si-bu*, or God, has at least twenty names; many natural objects have names peculiar to the priests, and the difference is so great that not only I, with my imperfect knowledge of the language, but Mr. Lyon, who speaks it as well as an Indian, could not understand even the purport of the songs. These songs are taught by rote to the young candidates to the priesthood, and are always rehearsed by the priests apart, before being sung. I made several efforts to obtain a vocabulary, but in each case was defeated, rather by the want of understanding on the part of the priest, than from any unwillingness to impart what they knew. At last I made an agreement with the most intelligent and best informed of them. He was to visit me at a certain time and answer all my questions —for a consideration. But a severe attack of rheumatism prevented his coming and lost me the last chance. I have no theory to offer as to the origin of this singular fact. But two explanations however, seem possible. Either the whole thing is an invention, which I think hardly probable, or the system is an exotic, and the songs are in the original language of the missionary who introduced it. I can hardly express my regret at failing to obtain some clue to so interesting a problem.

756 791 Finally come the *Awas*, sorcerers, or doctors. This is an open profession, and since it requires but little preparation, gives certain privileges and standing, and brings occasional emoluments, it is pretty numerously filled. The fellows are an arrant set of quacks, and I do not believe there is a single one who acts in good faith. Nevertheless, the people as a rule

765 sacrificing of a military macaw (*Ara militaris*)
782 over the grave.
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SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

614 certain clans still controls and keeps ritual
[423] property. This consists of drums or gold pre-
[756] Columbian figures (*see* Myths: *Clan Protec-*
[422] *tors*). Formerly the *usegLa* administered jus-
tice within the clan. Now the medicine man
[627] sometimes assumes this role although the most
[692] usual method is for the family of the culprit
[681] to take matters into their own hands. In ex-
[184] treme cases such as a sexual offense within the
[423] clan or murder, poison is given or the offender
is buried alive. On the Pacific slope, land
tenure by individual clans disappears. Three
or two groups, as the case may be, settle in
a given section such as Cabagra or China
Kichá, and own land as a single unit.

These people know, however, of their
Talamancan counterparts and keep as a goal
[484] the idea of visiting, at least to know personally,
[184] the home site of their clan on the Caribbean
[422] watershed. Clan-owned ritual property does
692 not appear on the Pacific. The family unit
on this side has been known to administer
justice, but this task is usually left to the Costa
Rican civil authorities in the nearest center.

614 Gabb does not seem to have considered the
[114] clans, rather he makes a distinction in social
565 classes,[116] indicating the Cabécar *usegLa*, or
high priest, as the spiritual head of both Bribri
[793] and Cabécar, while the temporal ruler was
[643] Bribri. This lay head was known as the "King"
and tradition holds that there were two clans
of "Kings." These were not inter-marriageable.
Only one clan of these remains today (*see*
Non-Documental History of Talamanca). The
793 Indians recount that the most powerful indi-
692 vidual was the *usegLa* who spoke both Bribri
and Cabécar. It is said that complaints were
passed from the "King" to him for decisive
action. On such occasions, he retired to a
secret and sacred cave which had much *pita*
(*see* Fibers) at the entrance. There he had
sacred jaguars known as "dogs" and snakes at
his command. The last *usegLa* is supposed to
[164] have died from smallpox during the first half
614 of the 20th century. The clan of the *usegLa*
177 still exists, however, in the upper Coen, Tala-

6:Stone E-8 (1956-1959)1962

SA19 Talamanca SA19
Cabecar
Bribri

[P. 50(A)]

Dispersal

(*Cabécar*)

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The medicine men recount that the Spaniards seized their people and sent them to Ujarrás and to San José.[186] They were hunted with dogs who picked up their scent. The Cabécares hid in the forests and killed the Spaniards and the dogs with arrows. This annoyed the Spaniards and they put armor on some of the dogs. Sick at heart, the Cabécares went to a waterfall and with the aid of a ladder, climbed up so the dogs couldn't smell them. The Indians then fled to different parts.

Sacrifice to a King

(*Bribri*)

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[714]

The last Bribri king adopted a young Térraba (*brosbi*) boy and brought him up. He was so very brave that he did not need a shield[187] to protect him from lances when in battle. He fought for and defended the Bribri as if he were one of them, alone setting fire to enemy roofs. The sad fact, however, was that he was not a Bribri but a captured boy. When the king died, even though the young Térraba cried as if he had lost his own father, the Bribri killed him and he fell on top of the king's body.

The End of the *usegLa* and the King

(*Cabécar and Bribri*)

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Neither the *usegLa* nor the King were good to the people. If someone laughed in front of the *usegLa*, his mouth became fixed in that position. If he looked in a way the *usegLa* did not like, his eyes were closed permanently. The King took the bravest men and tied them to posts and beat them with knives made of *pejibaye*.

The people did not like this and fled from

[186] This is not exactly true. The Costa Rican government forcibly brought Cabécares to Tucurrique and Orosi as punishment for uprisings in Talamanca. *See* Fernández, 1883, vol. III, ftn. 10, and section of History in this paper.

173 Talamanca. This upset the medicine men.
793 They decided to protect the people and they
643 bewitched the *usegLa* and the King. That is
[754] why there are none today.

The Foundation of Cabagra

(*Bribri*)

173 The ancient Borucas made the original trail.
166 Over this came *teka*, the first man who came
643 to live in Cabagra. He left Talamanca because of King *Berchí*[188] who took delight in severely castigating the medicine men and ordering all the people of the tribe. *Berchí* was a member of the *sáLwak*[189] clan, so-called because he had a monkey's tail, and anyone who laughed at him he had beaten.

173 *teka* brought his whole family along to
166 Cabagra but they did not want to stay. He returned them to Talamanca and came back all alone. This trip took eight days. He was
173 not baptized, but later he was and received
797 the name of Ciriaco. We do not know his family name. More people followed him and settled in Cabagra because of King *Berchí*'s cruelty.

A bishop came and rebaptized the population. Then he crossed the range to Talamanca accompanied by Térrabas, Borucas, and Cabagras.

The Last Kings of Talamanca

(*Bribri*)
(*Recounted in the plain.*)

173 Santiago Umaña belonged to the *kumbum-*
643 *wak* clan. He was the last king of Talamanca and wore a gold hummingbird called *batzín* in Bribri. He sold Talamanca to foreigners for money and went to England to receive it. He sold the children of our people.

Berchí was another king. He was the one who tied the best men to a tree and beat them to punish them. *Berchí* belonged to the *sáLwak* clan. He killed Santiago.

[597]
[714]

[187] Some Indians say turtle shell.
[188] *See* Appendix III: Antonio Saldaña.
[189] *sáL* is "monkey." *wak* is "race" or "seed" or "clan."